

BELLY OF THE BEAST QUICK START

Get together a group of two or more people with some dice, paper, and pencils (or digital equivalents). One person is the **Game Master (GM)**, who runs all of the **non-player characters (NPCs)**, describes the environment, and sets the Difficulty for various **Tasks**. Each other person plays one **character**.

This character is a Scavenger in the Evergut, personally compelled by their **Instincts** and a desperate need for supplies salvaged from the remains of the Eaten Age - the last of civilization swallowed by the Beast. Think *Mad Max* meets *Valhalla Rising* with a dash of the *Darkest Dungeons* video game.

First, define the nature of your **game concept** as a group - including the tone, the balance between **pulls** (scavenging runs) and combat, and the scale and scope of the narrative. It helps to assume the characters' **company** (team of scavengers) all know and trust each other already - even belonging to the same clan.

Then, each player makes a **character** that aligns with the game:

1. Come up with a **character concept**
2. Select two **Instincts**, and one of the available **Maneuvers** for each Instinct selected
 - a. **Curiosity**
 - i. Spend 1 ID to learn of something immediately useful and currently unknown in the Scene.
 - ii. Each ID spent to identify the reason of a particular occurrence, intent, attitude, place, or object is an automatic success.
 - b. **Fear**
 - i. Spend 1 ID to identify every potential danger in the current Scene.
 - ii. Each ID spent to retreat, evade, hide, or flee from something you fear is a success.

- c. **Greed**
 - i. Spend 1 ID to discover the most valuable objects in a current Scene or place.
 - ii. Each ID spent to haggle, sell, or get more profits out of salvage is an automatic success.
- d. **Loyalty**
 - i. Spend 1 ID to suffer a Complication, Consequence, or Injury in an ally's stead.
 - ii. Each ID spent to complete a Scene Task is an automatic success.
- e. **Violence**
 - i. Spend 1 ID to learn an enemy's weakness, granting AD as appropriate.
 - ii. Each ID spent to ignore Injury, Complications, or Consequences during combat is an automatic success.

3. Rank your **Skills** (Awareness, Coordination, Cunning, Influence, Lore, Might, Resolve, Stealth) in one of four ways:
 - a. **Standard:** 1 Brilliant, 1 Capable, 5 Acceptable, 1 Rotten
 - b. **Versatile:** 2 Capable, 6 Acceptable
 - c. **Focused:** 1 Brilliant, 2 Capable, 3 Acceptable, 2 Rotten
 - d. **Specialized:** 1 Brilliant, 3 Capable, 1 Acceptable, 3 Rotten
 - i. Brilliant succeed on 3-6
 - ii. Capable succeed on 4-6
 - iii. Acceptable succeed on 5-6
 - iv. Rotten succeed on 6
4. Write one **Talent**, a self-defined ability that gives +1AD to any relevant roll. (e.g., *Tracker* would give +1AD when tracking, while *Archer* would give +1AD while shooting bows).
5. Select one **Specialty**, a role or area of expertise.
 - a. **Alchemist**
 - i. Permission to attempt impossible alchemy
 - ii. Automatically succeed at simple alchemy
 - b. **Bileborn**
 - i. Permission to attempt impossible Resists
 - ii. Automatically succeed Resisting environments

GAMEPLAY

All difficult actions are called **Tasks**. Tasks have a **Difficulty** of 1 to 5. Multiple Tasks make up a **Scene**. Players only ever roll. Players roll a relevant **Skill** to overcome a Task. Rolls get 1d for free. Characters can add **Instinct Dice (ID)** to their roll if they wish. Once ID are spent, they are gone forever, and new ID must be earned. They can gain **Advantage Dice (AD)** if they are in advantageous situations or have beneficial weapons, tools, or info.

Rolls = 1Base die + Instinct dice spent + Advantage dice

Tasks are either a **Short Task**, which must be completed in one roll (e.g., jumping over a pit), or a **Long Task**, which can be completed over multiple rolls (e.g., building a hut). A Long Task's Difficulty is reduced by the number of successes a player rolls. For example: Katarod rolls 3 successes against a Difficulty 5 Task, making it a Difficulty 2 Task.

If a player rolls **fewer successes** than a Short Task's Difficulty, the the character receives a **Consequence** or **Injury**. Consequences and Injuries are based off of the Task's **Severity** (which defaults to its Difficulty, but can vary as the GM desires). Whenever rolling **zero successes**, characters (and perhaps the company) suffer a Consequence or Injury equal to the Severity.

Consequences and Injuries can temporarily or permanently degrade a character's Skill (e.g., Capable to Acceptable), increase all or certain Tasks' Difficulty (e.g., physical Tasks receive +1 Difficulty), force a new Skill roll (e.g., roll Might) cause ID loss, or produce some other negative condition or effect. A Consequence can affect the character, the company, or the Task itself. A bad Consequence might be *the bridge collapses*; another might be *you cause the hogs to run in panic*.

Injuries directly affect the character and last for a number of weeks equal to its Severity. An Injury 3 might degrade the Might Skill by one Rank for three weeks after the Injury is healed.

- c. **Chirurgeon**
 - i. Permission to attempt impossible surgery
 - ii. Automatically succeed at basic first aid
 - d. **Connections**
 - i. Permission to roll Awareness or Influence to determine any local connections
 - ii. Automatically succeed at calling in favors
 - e. **Engineer**
 - i. Permission to attempt impossible engineering
 - ii. Automatically succeed when creating simple tools, machines, and construction
 - f. **Forager**
 - i. Permission to roll Cunning or Lore to find food and other useful bits
 - ii. Automatically succeed at feeding yourself
 - g. **Iron Lungs**
 - i. Permission to roll Resolve to hold breath indefinitely (a new roll every so often)
 - ii. Automatically succeed at ignoring negative effects of fumes, gases, or smoke
 - h. **Smith**
 - i. Permission to roll impossible crafting Tasks
 - ii. Automatically succeed at basic craft Tasks
 - i. **Tracker**
 - i. Permission to roll for impossible tracking
 - ii. Automatically succeed at knowing distances, directions, and finding your way out
 - j. **Trader**
 - i. Permission to roll impossible negotiations
 - ii. Automatically succeed at knowing business practices, values, and trading techniques
6. Characters **Advance** upon completing three successful pulls, each with a greater value. You can't Advance while you're **Ashamed**. Advancement grants:
- a. Improve one Skill's Rank (Bad to Adequate)
 - b. Gain or improve one Talent
 - c. Choose to swap out a Specialty
 - d. Choose to swap out one or both Instincts

If you gain a combined **Injury 5** or greater, you are **defeated** and can potentially **die**. Injuries take time to heal. A Lore (for surgery or curing sickness) or Resistance (for toughing through it) roll can expedite the process.

Threshold can be added to especially challenging Tasks. Threshold is how many of the character's successes are removed from their roll (e.g., a Task with Threshold 2 would make a character who rolled 2 Successes now have effectively rolled 0 Successes and trigger a Consequence).

Enemies function like Tasks, with a Difficulty, Severity, and Threshold. When Enemies attack, the character rolls a relevant Skill to **defend** (Might for blocking, Resistance for resisting poison or mental attacks, and Coordination or Awareness for dodging attacks, especially from bows and ranged weapons).

Characters must roll successes equal to the enemy's attack Severity in order to successfully defend. Rolling fewer successes causes the character to gain Injury equal to the **difference** between the successes and the attack's Severity (2 successes against a Severity 4 attack would cause Injury 2). If a character rolls no successes while defending, she suffers both an Injury **and** a Consequence.

A Scene can have a combined **Scene Difficulty**, which combines all of the Scene's Tasks and Enemies together into one easily trackable total.

Characters can choose to **Succumb** to one of their Instincts at any time, and this immediately concludes a Scene. The player temporarily loses control of the character, and the GM narrates how the character resolves the scene in a feral, basic way related to the Instinct. The character is now **Ashamed**. Inversely, characters can choose to **Transcend** one of their Instincts, resolving the Scene in a way that honors more civilized discourse. Once a character has Transcended an Instinct, it is no longer applicable for their character. Advancing restores a new Instinct.

You can't roll more than **10d** or spend more than **5ID** on a roll.

INSTINCT AND INSTINCT DICE

ID are earned from **acting instinctively** - completing Tasks and actions in a way that demonstrates your basic impulses. Regardless of whether you succeed or fail, you gain ID based upon your actions and the purpose of those actions. In addition, as a Scavenger, you gain ID when you:

1. discover **clues** that lead to a valuable **haul**
2. successfully complete a **pull** (salvaging resources)
3. **barter** your haul successfully

ID are **earned** throughout a Scene, but aren't **gained** (and actually added to the **Instinct pool**) until the Scene's conclusion. At the end of each Scene, the GM and players should discuss which - if any - instinctive actions occurred that deserve ID.

As soon as ID are **spent**, such as when adding dice to a roll or activating an Instinct Maneuver or Specialty, they are removed from the character's available ID pool. These dice can't be used again, and new dice must be earned and gained.

Each instinctive action is worth around **3ID**, but especially minor or major instances can be worth more or less. Characters' Instinct pool will wax and wane, but at the beginning of any particularly dangerous Scene should have roughly 10ID at their disposal. By default, there is no upper limit on the number of ID in your pool.

Instinct Maneuvers can be used at any time, even if it is not the character's turn.

If a character has Transcended an Instinct, it is removed from their character sheet and they no longer gain ID when acting in a way that reflects this Instinct. They can acquire a new Instinct once they Advance, although the Instinct chosen must be narratively fitting and approved by the GM.

SPARK OF WAR

Quickstart Pull

Nillox, a stronghold friendly to the characters' company, was recently raided. The brutal attack left many dead, much of the hold in shambles, and the need for supplies and weapons at an all time high. The characters know of **The Web** - a nearby ruin of a massive city - but have to contend with others picking it over.

They hear from the survivors, including their leader **Hromb** (or an established NPC), that the attackers bore the sigils, markings, and weapons of the **Chuben**, a clan of nomads that has fought against and traded with Nillox for decades.

Any character that overcomes a Short Awareness or Lore Task **D2** will see that the method of attack, the specific targets, and the items stolen don't match with what they know about the **Chuben**.

THE WEB RUINS

The once resplendent city of **Inghop** was a bustling trade hub that connected half a dozen Empires with local clans and peoples. It was an epicenter of knowledge, engineering, and peaceful economic growth for nearly a century before being devoured.

Now it is lodged between a funnel-like crevice in the Evergut, many layers of stone and wood crammed and enmeshed like an insanely complex web, growing in density the farther down one goes. Because of its uniquely harrowing position, it has an abundance of profitable hauls waiting to be pulled by scavengers - but is exceedingly dangerous to traverse.

The city contains most of the essentials **Nillox** needs, including a largely intact **granary** that is in a highly contested region of the ruins. A company of scavengers led by **Rolte** - a careful woman known to employ stealth tactics - is likely to negotiate, sabotage, or otherwise interfere with the characters' efforts.

A pack of reavers led by **Viggot** - crazed and lusting off of Beastflesh - stalk the ruins in search of vulnerable scavengers. They've left a dead packhog laden with bronze weapons as **bait**.

The ruins themselves possess a number of hazards (each of which can be a **Scene D2** per scavenger), including falling debris, maintaining balance over delicately stacked platforms, avoiding slipping on aqueous grease from the Beast, and a fire that can quickly spread due to the abundance of pooled Beastfat.

ROLTE'S COMPANY

Rolte is reasonable, and if the scavengers detect her or her fellows (an Awareness Long Task **D5**), she will negotiate with the characters for a share in their haul, or in the Web's territory overall. The characters may also wish to barter with any of her comrades - which possess some interesting trinkets (magnets, glass bottles, copper wire, silken rope, and some figurines).

Rolte is **D4 / S2 / T1** with armor against cutting weapons, and each of her fellow scavengers is a **D2 / S1** typical enemy. They will use Stealth and Tactics, giving them **+T1** if fighting as such.

VIGGOT'S REAVERS

Viggot is sadistic, and while he doesn't mind sacrificing his own comrades, he will not personally engage in a fight he thinks he'll lose. He much prefers to use traps, bait, poison, and other nasty tactics to ensnare and torture his victims, leaving them alive but crippled.

It was in fact this pack of reavers that attacked **Nillox**, having masqueraded as the **Chuben** in order to spark conflict between the two groups. Viggot can be convinced or intimidated (an Influence Short Task **D3**) to back away from the scavengers or that they aren't worth the trouble - but will only speak to them if they meet on equal tactical footing or in mutual surprise.

Viggot is **D5 / S4 / T1** with stealth and cover, and will use a crossbow to great effect. Each of his reavers is a **D1 / S2** enemy.

CHUBEN

If visiting the **Chuben**, the scavengers learn they suffered an attack, killing several of their warriors. They believe **Nillox** is to blame. If their leader **Yunaka** can be convinced (Scene Influence Task **D1** per scavenger), she and her warriors will help fight.

BOTB REFERENCE SHEET

Setting: the Evergut, Belly, or Swallowed Society. Roughly twelfth century Byzantine Empire swallowed by a worm the size of the Himalayas. Technology has regressed to stone or bronze age, people live in small strongholds or nomadic clans, and scavenge the refuse of their eaten civilization. There's no true magic, some alchemy and botany, and most people live off of hog bloodbutter.

Characters: the characters are **scavengers**, professional foragers and specialists who seek out the especially rare, valuable, or useful items from the many ruins stuck in various chambers of the Belly.

Tasks: any challenging action that's narratively significant.

- **Difficulty:** how many successes to overcome the Task (1-5)
- **Severity:** the level of punishment for failure (1-5)
- **Threshold:** optional, reduces incoming successes (1-4)

Short Tasks: only one character can attempt, only roll once.

- Fewer successes than Difficulty = Consequences and failure

Long Tasks: multiple characters can attempt, multiple rolls.

- Fewer successes than Difficulty = Complications or twists
- Difficulty is reduced by cumulative successes

Scene Tasks: large scale collection of multiple Tasks, multiple characters and multiple rolls are allowed (varies by Task)

- Each success in the Scene reduces the Scene Difficulty

Rolls = 1Base die + Instinct dice + Advantage dice

Base die (BD): the free, default die for any attempted roll

Instinct dice (ID): spend to add to a roll, earned by Instincts

Advantage dice (AD): circumstantial bonus dice

Combat and Enemies: Tasks. Successful attacks reduce **Difficulty**. Characters defend against the enemy's **Severity**.

Consequences: the repercussions of rolling zero successes, or fewer successes than a Short Task's Difficulty. These can affect the acting character, all characters, or the Scene in general.

Injury: apply a penalty to a relevant Skill or type of action. Gained through Consequences equal to the Task or Enemy's Severity, or the difference of a character's defend successes against an enemy's attack Severity.

Spending ID: Spend max 5 ID to add that number of dice to a roll. ID can be spent to activate Instinct Maneuvers. Players announce when they have done so.

Nearly every roll will require expenditure of ID

Earning ID: behave in accordance with one of your two Instincts. You earn these ID during the course of a Scene, but they are not added to your Instinct pool until the end of the scene. Players announce or clarify when and if their character has done so. GM approval and group discussion is encouraged at the end of a Scene.

The GM can say "Earn 3ID for each instinctive action your character committed during the Scene. If you're not sure, bring it up with the group," and allow the players to keep track.

Gaining ID: Any ID earned during the preceding Scene are now added to the Instinct pool. GMs announce when this occurs.

Instincts: each character has two Instincts that earn them ID and provide Instinct Maneuvers.

Curiosity Fear Greed

Loyalty Violence